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nature of God is love, Christian conduct, which, according to Paul, is the outward expression of the God-nature within, must be determined by love.

8. The source of Paul's doctrine that God is love, seems to be neither the Old Testament nor the earthly life and

teaching of Jesus, but that supreme demonstration on the part of Jesus of his love for men, namely, his redemptive death.

In a subsequent paper the adaptability of the ethics of Paul to our times will be considered.

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## MAKING OVER RELIGIOUS DEMOCRACY

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It is a characteristic of life that it is always in process. It is evidence of vitality in the Christian church that it is undergoing continual change. Nowhere is this change going on more strikingly than in the making over of such independent democratic churches as the Baptist and Congregationalist churches in the United States.

Both of these bodies find their immediate ancestry in the Independents of Great Britain, their remoter kin in the Anabaptists of the Continent, their prototype in the Christians of the primitive church. They organized their independent congregations on the basis of a converted membership, and claimed independence of any hierarchy of clergy or church courts. Yet there was a period of experiment before the normal Congregational type was produced.

### **Coquetting with Presbyterianism**

The Reformed churches on the Continent retained the Catholic custom of resorting to ecclesiastical courts for

administration, counsel, and discipline. It is not strange therefore that, when the German Anabaptists organized as a separate sect in 1527, they provided for a district council and a superintendent over the churches of the district, and arranged further for a synod above the council. In England the General Baptists organized an association early in the seventeenth century, which for a time took cognizance of cases of discipline, heard appeals from the churches, and appointed elders or overseers to plant new churches and to have a modified control over all the churches in the association that elected them. Not content with associations, the General Baptists organized general assemblies which exercised a right of appeal from churches and associations. In both Germany and England, however, these experiments were short lived, as both bodies declined rapidly.

English speaking Congregationalists started as democratic bodies. Their standard bearer, Robert Browne, laid

down as fundamental principles, (1) the right of the individual to decide for himself his church affiliations, (2) the sufficiency of the local church to elect and ordain its officers and to control its own affairs, (3) the principle of fellowship between churches and the exchange of counsel, but without any central authority to exercise discipline or dictate in matters of faith or practice. But for a century the early English and American Congregationalists inclined toward a modified Congregationalism, which has been called Barrowism, really semi-Presbyterianism, because it recognized elders with large powers in the local churches, and followed the practice of holding synods and consociations, which laid down rules of doctrine and discipline for all the churches, though the rules could not be enforced. Before the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Congregationalism had shaken itself fairly free of these encumbrances, except in Connecticut.

#### **The Association**

Out of the principle of fellowship came the association of churches or ministers among the regular Baptists and Congregationalists. The first associations were in England, but they gained greater importance in America. The association was a voluntary organization existing for mutual benefit, but expressly repudiating any right to give decisions to local churches. It was inclined to free itself from troublesome cases of discipline by turning these over to temporary local councils of church delegates which advised with the particular church that was in difficulty. The association was useful as a buffer against the hostility of the

Anglican church in England and of the "standing order" in New England.

The Philadelphia Association of Baptists was the pioneer in America (1707). It sent out evangelists who indoctrinated the South with those Baptist principles that are so prevalent today. It prepared a denominational confession of faith. It interested itself in education, helped to found in Providence the first Baptist college, and gave of its leaders to the New England churches. Other associations came into existence North and South with the multiplication of churches, and such organizations followed missions and church planting beyond the Alleghenies.

#### **The Voluntary Society**

The propaganda of evangelical democracy demanded missionaries, first into the frontier regions of American settlement and then abroad. Missionary experiments were made under associational auspices, but were not altogether successful, chiefly because of the fear that associations would become too powerful. Necessity mothered the voluntary society, and numerous were the offspring. A few like-minded individuals might organize themselves into a missionary society or an education board, and underwrite the various enterprises of the denomination without the danger of establishing a ruling council or assembly. Among the early examples of such voluntary groups are the English Baptist Missionary Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, both formed with the object of carrying Christianity to pagans in the Eastern Hemisphere, and state missionary societies in the United States organized to evangelize the frontiers and

to help the weak churches at home. Very soon educational institutions were founded in the East, including academies, colleges, and theological seminaries, and as fast as settlements were made and schools planted along the advancing western frontier the school found its place there also. Education societies took upon themselves the task of raising funds for these schools. Then came Bible and tract societies, Sunday schools, and publication societies, and at various times women's missionary societies, children's missionary and temperance bands, and eventually the Christian Endeavor and allied organizations for young people. All these organizations were composed of adherents of the churches, and were fostered and supported by the people of the denominations, but their trustees and directors were not delegates of churches, as in the associations. Added to all these were ministers' conferences and clubs, and laymen's social unions.

The nineteenth century opened a wider vista to the churches of America. Numerous were the denominations and the organizations demanding support, and sometimes there was duplication of effort and a lack of co-ordination and co-operation that proved a distinct handicap. The history of the century is a commentary on the merits of independence. Looking back probably no one would be willing to see its abrogation, but the extreme application of the principle clearly had its weaknesses. Local churches and their members were confused through an ever-increasing multitude of unco-ordinated agencies and gave them only spasmodic support. Associations gave a place on their programs to representatives of various interests, but

felt no vital relationship to them. Actually associations have done little more than furnish an annual stimulus to the heart action of the denomination, exercising the functions of spiritual mourner, missionary mentor, and gossip-monger for the churches of the district. Conscious of these weaknesses and compelled to action by the inexorable law that success is in proportion to efficiency, both Baptists and Congregationalists invented new machinery, which can be justified only by a most elastic interpretation of any New Testament polity, but which were urgently demanded by the situation and which were sanctioned by the will of the religious democracy.

#### **The State and National Conventions**

Among the voluntary societies of the nineteenth century were the state missionary societies. Gradually they were compelled to enlarge their interests. Immigrants were pouring into the country. The shift of population from country to city compelled the planting of mission churches in the growing centers and the cherishing of weakened rural churches. Sunday-school interests allied themselves with the state society. Ministers' conferences and charitable societies and education societies grouped themselves with the rest for annual conferences. The next natural step was to co-ordinate if not to consolidate all of these in a state convention, a process which is now going on. State conventions have been comparatively irresponsible, and their secretaries have become powerful superintendents of denominational interests within state lines, but rarely has there been any abuse of authority.

In recent years a similar process has been in evidence along national lines. Great missionary and publication societies were doing heroic service, but there were larger interests demanding consideration, and a platform was needed to give expression to denominational convictions. The Congregationalists led the way in the organization of a National Council in 1871, consisting of ministerial and lay delegates from local bodies. Its history for nearly half a century has demonstrated its usefulness. It has always disclaimed any intention to infringe upon the rights of the churches, but the logic of events has led to a modification of Congregational polity which has resulted in a centralization of organization and interests in this national body. The Council now meets biennially and has its general secretary as the personification of the dignity and energy of the denomination. Along the same path but more slowly have moved the Baptists. Southern Baptists had organized one convention in 1845 for all their interests, but the Northern Baptist Convention did not have its inception until 1907. Within ten years, however, it has demonstrated its value. It has examined itself and its constituency through commissions, strengthened its forces through committee action, correlated the work of the great societies by patient conference, systematized denominational benevolences and improved their machinery, and from time to time found expression for the denominational consciousness.

Religious democracy is rapidly passing from the pure to the representative type, as is political democracy, safeguarded by the theory of local inde-

pendence, and by occasional resort to a referendum of some sort. In both politics and religion there is a growing consciousness of social solidarity, of large responsibilities, and a demand for efficiency in meeting them, and of enlarging opportunities for public service.

### **Survival or Readjustment?**

Future readjustments touch present organization at four points—the local church, the association, the state conference or convention, and the national council or convention.

The average local church has too many organizations in proportion to the number of its working members, and these organizations are not well co-ordinated. There is need of a directing staff, or pastor's cabinet, composed of a representative from each department of church work, in active co-operation with committees that correspond to the specific functions that the church has to perform. For example, every church should have a committee on religious education, which would co-ordinate and direct all the educational work now distributed haphazard among the Sunday schools, the young people's societies, and the women's missionary organizations.

The association needs redirection. Its function has been too narrow. As an effective agency of the church militant it has been a failure. Attempts to rejuvenate it have met with only slight success. It is an open question whether the normal association has not outlived its usefulness except in the rural districts; at least it seems probable that it must be radically changed. The association came into existence when all the churches were rural, when hospitality

was universal, and when ministers and laymen had ample time for such junketing. In those days the interests of the churches were confined mainly to evangelism, comity, and matters of discipline. Associations in the country are still practicable, and rural churches have their common problems of local evangelism, comity, and community service that call for periodical conference. In the busy towns there are other problems, and the churches in such environment should be grouped according to their concerns in their own conferences, each with its committees on city missions, comity and co-operation, civic affairs, community service, and the unchurched. The growing cities of the United States present a problem that the historic polity of independency seems unable to solve. Perhaps the permanent council with enlarged functions may be the type of organization needed in the cities to take the place of the old-fashioned association.

The state convention or conference, supplemented perhaps by a denominational assembly of several states, as in the case of the New England conference of Congregationalists, is certain to become increasingly prominent and powerful. When it has merged the separate societies that are nearly allied, it is likely to have departments or boards, each with its secretary to have charge of evangelism, education, social service, young people's work, and ministerial supply and maintenance throughout the state, while the general secretary will become increasingly important with large executive powers.

#### **Recent State Convention History**

The co-ordinating movement of recent years appears especially in the closer

affiliation of the state conventions with the national societies, and in the closer relations of state secretaries with one another. The national societies have come more and more to look to the co-operation of the state convention in raising funds, in work for new Americans, and in furthering religious education. The "movements" of recent years have brought them into co-operation, and some of the states have become the agents of all the missionary and beneficent interests of the denomination. The Northern Baptist Convention has taken specific action in recognition of its dependence upon the assistance of the state boards. When this growing connection with the state convention is placed alongside the close relation of the national societies and the national convention, it becomes clear that the direction and administration of the voluntary societies are becoming increasingly dependent on the delegated bodies that represent the churches. This means that the associational type of organization is recovering its place on the larger field of state and national interests.

It is a social law that individuals with similar interests and responsibilities naturally associate as a group. This explains why state governors have met in conference to discuss their common problems, and it explains why for the last four or five years state secretaries have come to have their annual conferences, sometimes in connection with conferences of the officials of the general societies, to discuss evangelism, the rural problem, the denominational press, and the relations of the societies to the conventions. It is natural to look forward to a time when the secretarial confer-

ences will become a fixed part of the denominational machinery, where plans may be initiated for more effective, because more co-ordinated, undertakings.

### **National Organization**

In the field of the Northern Baptist Convention and the Congregational National Council there is nothing fixed. The experience of some years has given convincing evidence of the value of the organizations, but has revealed desirable improvements which are being made as fast as the denominational mind approves. In the first place it seems likely that organization will become still more centralized until not only will the great missionary and education societies become boards of the Convention, but as in the state various boards and commissions will become similar boards of the Convention. These will include at least young people's work, social service, and education. It is worth considering whether such issues as these that confront our American churches do not need as much money and concerted attention as do the interests of peoples in far away continents. The marvelous migration of peoples to America presents a problem that is too big for any one society or state to handle; it might well be made a department of the national Convention. The same is true of the rural-church problem. The problem of organization is a problem of readjustment to meet the demands of a new day.

In the second place it is an open question whether the biennial plan of meeting adopted by the Congregationalists is not

better than the annual plan of the Baptists. It would then be possible for the Baptist Convention which represents such a widely scattered constituency to meet in sections in the alternate years when the main body is not in session. There would be a value in annual mass meetings in each district, mainly of an inspirational nature, while the business of the whole Convention could well be reserved for a biennial meeting of a strictly representative assembly, with department meetings for special conference.

If representative democracy is to maintain itself and prove adequate to the mission of the church in the days of world readjustments and new rivalries; if it is to respond to the demands for spiritual guidance and moral inspiration and social reformation that are filling the air; if it is to be effective in making the ideals of the Kingdom practical, it must not be afraid to mend where it can and alter where it must, not hidebound by old custom or carried away by iconoclastic zeal, but steadily and courageously planning and experimenting to get as much power as possible out of the kindling spirit and the denominational machinery. The independent denominations cannot afford a policy of opportunism; rather they must understand their functions, define their policies, and determine their organizations along the lines of a telic, constructive statesmanship. Then they may expect to have a place in the sun and respectful recognition from those whose forms of creed or organization are not the same.